

Technical Research Note 210

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PREDICTION OF DISCIPLINARY OFFENSE EARLY IN ARMY SERVICE

Emilie E. Larson and Donald M. Kristiansen

MILITARY SELECTION RESEARCH DIVISION



U. S. Army
Behavioral Science Research Laboratory

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FOREWORD

With every change in standards of acceptability for Army service, questions arise concerning the impact of introducing various levels of ability in the enlisted personnel system. The BESRL Work Unit, "Optimum Distribution of Individual Abilities for Unit Effectiveness," seeks to determine what balance of personnel of various ability levels is essential to unit effectiveness. To this end, objective measures of the performance of individuals and units are needed to enable the evaluation of varying mixes of ability levels within a unit. Special attention is directed to disciplinary problems which have been found to be more frequent among men of low mental ability. The present publication summarizes the results of attempts to identify through written questionnaires those men who are likely to become disciplinary problems. The entire research effort is conducted under Army RDT&E Project No. 2Q062106A722, "Selection and Behavioral Evaluation," 1969 Work Program.



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U. S. Army Behavioral Science
Research Laboratory

PREDICTION OF DISCIPLINARY OFFENSE EARLY IN ARMY SERVICE

BRIEF

Requirement:

To evaluate selected written instruments for their effectiveness in identifying enlisted input likely to incur military discipline early during service.

Procedure:

Three measures derived from the Personal Opinion Study, a personality questionnaire developed at the University of Illinois, and an Overall Acceptability measure representing the best written predictor of Army disciplinary record that has resulted from previous BESRL research, were obtained for a large sample of men tested at Reception Stations. For 1999 of these men, disciplinary records of their first 16 weeks in the Army were obtained and men were categorized as offenders (6%) and nonoffenders (94%). Phi or point biserial coefficients of the experimental predictors were computed. A special analysis was made in a subsample of lower ability men admitted under the lower mental standards established in 1965 and 1966.

Findings:

None of the measures tried out was sufficiently effective for operational use in the early identification of potential offenders.

The most effective predictor, the Overall Acceptability measure, would screen out an undue number of nonoffenders in order to identify a small number of potential early offenders.

Utilization of Findings:

Taken together with similar findings on the prediction of military offenses during two years of service, these findings should discourage efforts to predict individual disciplinary offenses on the basis of individual soldier characteristics on entry to military service. Increases in offense rate may be predicted when the Army inducts or enlists large numbers of men who admit to being high school drop-outs, gang members, and erratic employees or "job drifters," but there are too many nonoffenders among such men to permit individual identification.

PREDICTION OF DISCIPLINARY OFFENSE EARLY IN ARMY SERVICE

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PREDICTION OF DISCIPLINARY OFFENSE EARLY IN ARMY SERVICE

Previous research and military experience have shown that persons of lower mental ability levels tend to have higher rates of disciplinary problems (1). For this reason, a lowering of mental standards can be expected to lead to an increase in the Army disciplinary rate. Since mental standards are lowered each time the Army faces mobilization, the relationship between mental ability level and disciplinary rate is a problem of recurring interest (2). In connection with recent draft calls, mental standards were lowered in 1965 and 1966. The new standards admitted additional persons who scored in Category IV on the AFQT (the lowest category legally acceptable for service). This increase led to renewed interest in disciplinary problems and in possible ways of identifying individuals having a high probability of becoming disciplinary offenders.

The present study was concerned with determining the effectiveness of a written instrument to identify persons likely to become offenders. This instrument would be administered prior to entry into the Army. Persons identified as probable offenders might either be rejected or assigned to some form of special training to prevent disciplinary offenses. Preventive efforts would have greatest value if they could be started early in training. The study was therefore focused on disciplinary record during initial training, approximately the first sixteen weeks of military service. A special interest of the study was the possibility of predicting disciplinary offenses among the low mental ability men admitted to the Army under the new lower standards. They could be expected to include a high proportion of potential offenders and to account for a large portion of the expected increase in Army disciplinary rate. If the number of actual offenders in this group could be minimized, the disciplinary rate could be expected to be nearly normal.

BACKGROUND

BESRL has made several investigations of written instruments as predictors of disciplinary offenses. One of the most recent studies of this problem began in 1958 when the Personal History Form (PT 3556) was administered to approximately 3000 basic trainees as one phase of a general attack on the problem of identifying men not expected to conduct themselves acceptably in the Army (3). The Personal History Form was a background questionnaire developed by BESRL to predict court-martial conviction and other-than-honorable discharge in the first two years of service. The overall validity of the questionnaire was not sufficient to warrant its use as a special screening device.

In other phases of the research program on overall acceptability, BESRL identified several variables of a background nature which are positively related to disciplinary record and are available prior to a

man's entry into the Army. Mental ability level (AFQT score), age at entry, and civilian education provide a stable relationship with disciplinary record (1), (4). Race and enlistee/inductee status also have shown some relation to disciplinary record (5). Offenders have tended to have lower mental abilities, be younger at entry, and to have less education than nonoffenders. There has been a higher incidence of disciplinary offenses among Negroes than among Caucasians and among enlistees (Regular Army volunteers) than among inductees (draftees).

METHOD

The general approach in the present study was to validate possible predictor variables, both written instruments and background information, against disciplinary records collected during initial Army training. The question of major concern was the practical usefulness of a written instrument. In view of the added time and money involved in using a special written instrument and the known relationship of background data to disciplinary record--readily available prior to a man's entry into the Army--a written instrument would have to be distinctly superior to the background variables to warrant its use.

A second question was whether an instrument might be valid for the subsample of low ability men admitted under the new lower standards. This subsample consisted of all men scoring in Category IV on the AFQT and not having graduated from high school.

The design of the study was to administer the written predictor instruments to new recruits as they arrived at Army Reception Stations for processing into the Army. All eleven Reception Stations administered the instruments to men arriving the week of 6 March 1967 and scheduled to begin Basic Combat Training (BCT) on 13 March 1967. BCT is an eight-week course attended by all new soldiers. Background information on these men was obtained from the Trainee Master File of the U. S. Army Data Support Command and from answer sheets completed at the Reception Stations. Criterion data were collected on all men who entered BCT on 13 March 1967 and Advanced Individual Training (AIT) on 8 May 1967. AIT consists of courses given as preparation for specific jobs in the Army. The training centers were instructed to submit criterion data on the men in the sample at the conclusion of the BCT or AIT course. The length of AIT courses varies, but most courses require about eight weeks; thus the men in this sample had experienced a total of about sixteen weeks of training.

Population and Sample

The population to which the present study applies consists of men beginning their first tour of service. Enlisted reservists were excluded because they constitute a very small portion of the discipline problem. Races other than Caucasian and Negroid were excluded because

they are such a small part of the Army that no meaningful subsample of them could have been drawn from the sample of the size planned for this study. The sample used in this study consisted of 1999 men who entered BCT 13 March 1967 and for whom complete criterion data was obtained from both BCT and AIT centers.

Predictor Scales

Personal Opinion Study (Three Scales). The Personal Opinion Study was selected as a new approach to the problem (6). This questionnaire, developed at the University of Illinois by Dr. Herbert Quay and Dr. Donald Peterson, was directed toward personal opinions with only a few questions on background information. The original purpose was to differentiate among diagnostic categories of institutionalized adolescent delinquents. The instrument had been standardized on adolescents and had not previously been used in military research. However, it seemed appropriate for use among high school drop-outs, and was therefore used as a possible predictor in the low ability subsample. There were three diagnostic categories corresponding to the three scale scores produced by the instrument: Psychopathic Delinquency Scale, Neurotic Delinquency Scale, and Subcultural Delinquency Scale.

The Psychopathic Delinquency (PD) scale was interpreted by its authors as reflecting "tough, amoral, rebellious qualities, coupled with impulsivity, a conspicuous distrust of authority, and a relative freedom from family and other interpersonal ties."¹ A person scoring high on the PD scale expressed dislike for other persons, particularly police, family, and older persons, and regarded stealing as an acceptable way of life. In short, he did not recognize cultural norms.

The Neurotic Delinquency (ND) scale also was intended to measure "impulsive and aggressive tendencies," but in this case "accompanied by tension, guilt, remorse, depression, and discouragement." The individual scoring high on the ND scale appeared to feel very insecure socially. He recognized the cultural norms but violated them for personal satisfaction.

The Subcultural Delinquency (SD) scale appeared to mirror attitudes, values, and behaviors commonly thought to occur among members of "culturally and economically disadvantaged delinquent" gangs in whom "personality maladjustment per se is not clearly evident." The person scoring high on

¹ Quoted material is from Quay, Herbert C. and Donald R. Peterson. The questionnaire measurement of personality dimensions associated with juvenile delinquency. Unpublished manuscript. NIH grants M-4909 and M-5627. Undated.

the SD scale was psychologically dependent on his peers (other gang members) rather than his family, and did not have strong personal values. He recognized the norms of the gang rather than those of the wider culture.

Overall Acceptability Scale. Items selected from BESRL's Personal History Form were used to construct a fourth scale (7). These items had been validated against a criterion of overall acceptable performance during the first two years of Army service. The new scale was designated the Overall Acceptability (OA) scale. Items were selected on the basis of their validity in the 1958 study. Some items had to be eliminated because they dealt with experience in Army training courses or because they overlapped other items in the scale. The remaining items having moderate validity were used to create the OA scale. This scale represents the best written predictor of Army discipline record that past BESRL research has produced. It deals primarily with background information rather than opinions. A person scoring high on the OA appears likely to be a former gang member and high school drop-out with an erratic work record.

Background Variables

The other predictor variables were based on background data. All these variables had demonstrated some relation to disciplinary criteria in past research: age at entry into the Army, race, civilian education level, mental ability level, and enlistee/inductee status. The civilian education variable refers to the number of years of education successfully completed. Mental ability was measured by the individual's Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) score. Enlistee/inductee status refers to the manner in which an individual entered the Army, as a Regular Army enlistee (volunteer) or an inductee (draftee).

Criterion Measure

Disciplinary record in the first sixteen weeks of Army experience was reduced to two categories, offenders and nonoffenders. Offenders had had one or more offenses in the sixteen weeks. Types of offense are shown by frequency in Table 1. The offending behaviors involved in each type are manifold and overlapping. The most common type, an Article 15, may be given for a large number of minor offenses the first time they are committed. An Article 15 offense means the individual was given punishment at the company level under Article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. This is a relatively mild form of punishment which does not result in lost time. Many kinds of delinquencies such as fighting, insubordination, and short AWOL (absent without official leave) are reasons for Article 15.

AWOL beyond a few days leads to lost time and other punishment. Undesirable discharges are issued under AR 635-89 or AR 635-212 for homosexual or other sexual perversions, drug addiction, alcoholism, shirking,

or other undesirable behavior such as repeated failure to pay debts. Punitive discharges are given under AR 635-204 after a court-martial conviction for repeated offenses or an offense comparable to a felony in a civilian court.

Of the 1999 subjects in the sample, 124 were identified as offenders, representing 6% of the sample. Of these, 56 committed an offense in BCT and 74 in AIT, including 6 who committed a second offense. Table 1 shows that few serious penalties were inflicted. The mixed character of the offense types and the low relative frequencies required that all offenders be combined in the analysis.

Table 1
FREQUENCIES OF TYPES OF OFFENSE COMMITTED IN AIT AND BCT

	Type of Offense						Total
	Article 15	AWOL at Data Collection	Court Martial	Undesirable Discharge Pending	Undesirable Discharge	Punitive Discharge	
BCT	46	4	3	3	0	0	56
AIT	43	21	4	2	2	2	74
Total	89	25	7	5	2	2	130 ^a

^aOffender frequencies total 124, since there were six repeaters in AIT.

Problems in the Analysis

There are two problems which must be discussed. The first is that the sample reported in this study is considerably smaller than the number of men tested at the Reception Stations. A total of 4123 men were tested; only 1999 men are reported here. The reason for the drop in sample size is that criterion data were very difficult to obtain from the AIT centers. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations, or percentages, for all predictor variables in both samples.

From these data, it is reasonable to conclude that the samples were practically identical insofar as the predictors are concerned. The known differences in the criterion were very small. Among the 4080 tested cases with BCT records, the offender percentage was 3.4% as compared with 2.8% in BCT for the reported sample. We assume the AIT data losses were random.

Table 2

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR TESTED AND REPORTED SAMPLES

Variable	Tested Sample (N = 4123)			Reported Sample (N = 1999)		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	%	\bar{X}	S.D.	%
OA Scale	8.58	2.92		8.69	2.87	
PD Scale	5.82	5.26		5.84	5.28	
ND Scale	7.93	5.62		7.95	5.65	
SD Scale	10.70	3.85		10.77	3.87	
Age at Entry	20.07	2.36		20.01	2.35	
Education	11.52	2.03		11.50	2.00	
AFQT Percentile Score	50.14	27.83		50.35	27.61	
Enlistee/Inductee Status	56.9 RA (Volunteers)			57.0 RA (Volunteers)		
Race	87.8 Caucasian			88.2 Caucasian		

The second problem is that of the very small size of the offender group--representing 6% of the total sample. Any predictor which could identify this 6% without also identifying a sizable part of the non-offending 94% of the sample would have to have exceptionally high validity. For example, to identify half the offender group within 6% of the total sample, a phi coefficient of .47 (roughly corresponding to a tetrachoric r of .89) would be required. To identify larger percentages of offenders, higher correlation would be needed. Lower correlation would mean identifying smaller percentages of offenders and higher percentages of false positives.

RESULTS

Validity coefficients were computed for each of the predictor variables (Table 3), either phi or point biserial coefficients. All the coefficients were low. Point biserial coefficients are generally higher than phi coefficients but do not run as high as tetrachorics. All the coefficients in Table 3 are far below those required for efficient identification of potential disciplinary cases.

Table 3
VALIDITY COEFFICIENTS FOR PREDICTOR VARIABLES
IN THE TOTAL SAMPLE
(N = 1999)

Variable	Validity Coefficient ^a
OA Scale	.16
PD Scale	.11
ND Scale	.08
SD Scale	.08
Age at Entry	-.05 ^b
Education	-.10
Race	.05
Enlistee/Inductee Status	-.02
AFQT Percentile Score	-.08

^aCoefficients are point biserials except for race and enlistee/inductee status which are phi's.

^bThe criterion was coded 0 for no disciplinary offense and 1 for one or more offenses; hence, the signs of the correlation coefficients are in the expected direction.

The implications of using the best single predictor in Table 3, the OA scale, are shown in Table 4. Several effectiveness indexes were computed for various likely cutting scores on the OA scale. Anyone scoring at or above the cutting score would be identified as a potential offender. Data for cutting scores below 12 are not presented because they require rejection of an unreasonably large proportion of the total sample. All the phi coefficients were low and the false positive percentages were high. The highest coefficient ($\phi = .16$) was obtained for a score of 12. This score identified 17% of the Army input as potential offenders, but 85% of these men were false positives. Other cutting scores identified smaller proportions of the Army input, but they also identified smaller proportions of the offender subsample. None of the cutting scores appear to be useful. Thus the OA scale, the best single predictor in the study, does not appear to be functionally useful in a screening program.

Table 4

EFFECTIVENESS OF SELECTED CUTTING SCORES OF THE OA SCALE

Identification	Cutting Scores				
	12	13	14	15	16
Effectiveness Indexes					
Selection Ratio, % of Army input identified as potential offenders.	17	11	6	3	2
True Positives, % of potential offenders who become actual offenders.	15	15	16	21	26
False Positives, % of potential offenders who do not become offenders	85	85	84	79	74
Maximum Gain, % of actual offenders properly identified against a 6% offense rate.	41	27	16	10	6
Phi Coefficient (ϕ)	.16	.13	.11	.11	.10

Table 5 shows multiple validity coefficients obtained for the sample. Two coefficients are given, one representing the validity when all the predictor variables are used, the other the validity when only the background variables are used. A comparison of the two coefficients shows that the written predictors account for variance beyond that accounted for by the background variables, but the multiple correlation ($R = .18$) using all predictors is so low that a multiple screening approach is not worth pursuing.

Table 5
MULTIPLE CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS IN THE TOTAL SAMPLE
(N = 1970)

Variable	Beta Weight
Background Variables Only	
	R = .12
Age at Entry	-.03
Education	-.07
Race	.04
Enlistee/Inductee Status	-.02
AFQT Percentile Score	-.04
All Variables (Background Plus Scales)	
	R = .18
Age at Entry	-.03
Education	-.01
Race	.03
Enlistee/Inductee Status	-.02
AFQT Percentile Score	-.03
OA Scale	.13
PD Scale	.05
ND Scale	.02
SD Scale	-.02

As previously mentioned, the subsample of low ability men admitted under the new lower standards was of special concern. The subsample consisting of AFQT Category IV men who had not graduated from high school totaled to 429 men, as shown in Table 6. The validity coefficients for this subsample were low, just as they were for the total sample in Table 3. These results show that the predictor variables are no more useful in the low ability subsample than in the total sample.

Table 7 shows descriptive statistics for the Category IV nongraduate subsample. Comparison of these data with the statistics for the entire sample in Table 2 shows that the subsample has higher mean scale scores as well as a higher percentage of offenders. Age at entry is approximately the same while AFQT score and education level are necessarily lower. The subsample contains fewer volunteers (RA component) and fewer Caucasians than the total sample.

Table 6

VALIDITY COEFFICIENTS FOR AFQT
CATEGORY IV NONGRADUATES
(N = 429)

Variable	Validity Coefficient ^a
OA Scale	.10
PD Scale	.07
ND Scale	.05
SD Scale	-.02
Age of Entry	-.11 ^b
Education	-.08
Race	.07
Enlistee/Inductee Status	-.07
AFQT Percentile Score	-.01

^aCoefficients are point biserials except for race and enlistee/inductee status which are phi's.

^bThe criterion was coded 0 for no offense and 1 for one or more offenses.

Table 7

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR AFQT CATEGORY IV NONGRADUATES

Variable	Statistics		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	%
OA Scale	9.67	2.94	
PD Scale	8.72	6.09	
ND Scale	10.02	5.57	
SD Scale	11.91	3.95	
Age at Entry	20.36	2.87	
Education	9.36	1.31	
AFQT Percentile Score	19.81	4.89	
Enlistee/Inductee Status			50.1 RA (Volunteers)
Race			79.2 Caucasian
Criterion			8.6 Offenders

CONCLUSIONS

None of the predictor variables used in the study were very useful for identifying potential early offenders. Several of the predictors were related to the criterion; however, the magnitude of the relationships was not large enough to indicate useful validity. While the coefficients were significantly greater than zero statistically, they were not practically significant for the purpose considered.

The OA scale was the variable having the most apparent usefulness. Use of this variable as a predictor would involve heavy cost in terms of false positives; many nonoffenders would have to be identified in order to find a relatively small number of offenders. The scales from the Quay-Peterson questionnaire were less valid than the OA scale. Offenses among the low mental ability subsample were related to some of the predictor variables, but, again, the relationships were not large enough to be useful.

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<p>Whenever changes are affected in standards of acceptability for Army service under mobilization conditions, questions recur concerning the impact of introducing various levels of ability in the enlisted personnel system. Objective measures of individual and unit performance are needed to determine what balance of varying mixes of ability levels within a unit is essential to its effectiveness. Special attention is directed to disciplinary problems which have been found to be more frequent among men of low mental ability. Technical Research Note 210 summarizes results of attempts to identify through written questionnaires those men who are likely to incur military discipline early during military service.</p> <p>Predictor measures were administered at Army Reception Stations to a total of 4123 men entering their first tour of service. Written predictors included three scales derived from the Personal Opinion Study developed at the University of Illinois and a fourth scale, Overall Acceptability, derived from previous BESRL research. Analysis was based on a sample of 1999 men who had experienced a total of 16 weeks of training and for whom complete criterion data were obtained from both BCT and AIT centers. The sample was categorized as offenders (6%) and nonoffenders (94%). Phi or point biserial coefficients of the experimental predictors were computed and a special analysis was made in a subsample of AFQT Category IV men admitted under the 1965-1966 lowered mental standards.</p> <p>Findings indicated that the Overall Acceptability scale was more valid than the scales from the Personal Opinion Study. None of the measures tried out, however, was sufficiently effective for operational use in the early identification of potential offenders. Use of the Overall Acceptability scale, the most effective predictor, would screen out an undue number of nonoffenders in order to find a relatively small number of potential early offenders.</p>		

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Psychological measurement						
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Behavioral evaluation						
Disciplinary record--prediction of						
Potential offenders						
Individual characteristics						
Predictor scales						
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